

# 1989

LOOK SHARP ■ LIVE SMART

## BRODIE OF THE YEAR RUSSELL WESTBROOK

- A\$AP ROCKY
- ANDERSON .PAAK
- JADEN SMITH
- TYLER, THE CREATOR
- JEFF GOLDBLUM
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# 1989

SPRING 2018 ISSUE NO. 30

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STORY BY **LAWRENCE PERRY**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JORDAN MILLINGTON**



Salvatore Ferragamo



# 1989

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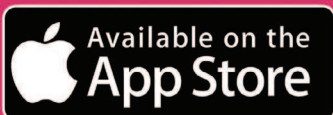
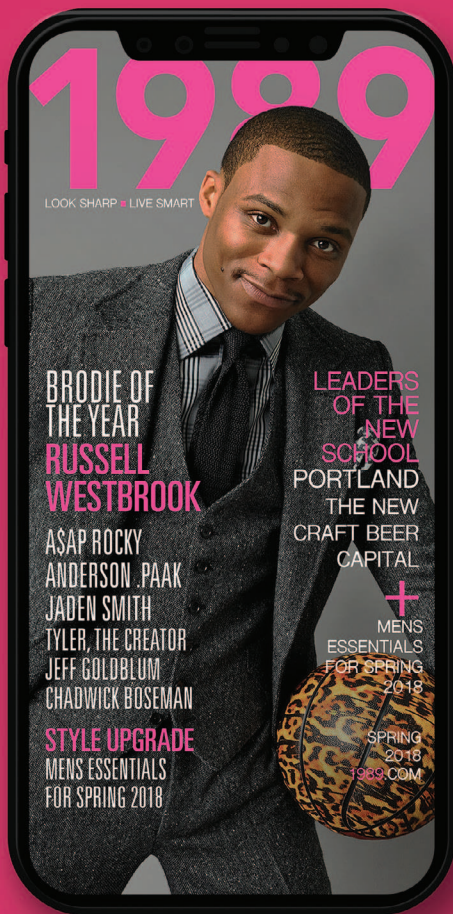
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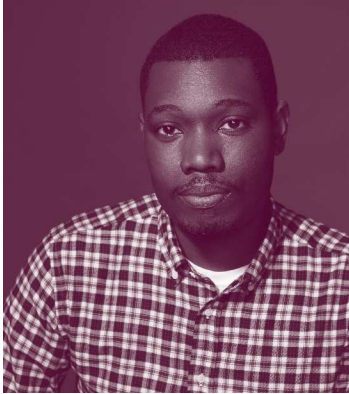
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# TOP P E

1989



## RUSSELL WESTBROOK CHOPS IT UP WITH US

WE BREAK HOW A\$AP ROCKY  
HAS BEEN SLAYING FASHION  
IN HIP-HOP FOR YEARS

THE #LITLIST FOR SPRING  
2018 ESSENTIALS FOR MEN



# A\$AP ROCKY FASHION KILLA

We break down the 'Raf' rapper's history and style on Hip-Hop

By: LAWRENCE PERRY PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SHOREFIRE

**Hip-hop's relationship with high-fashion goes back to the genre's beginnings.** With sartorial milestones stretching from Harlem's Dapper Dan making custom track suits from Louis Vuitton and Gucci fabrics to the Riccardo Tisci-designed cover of *Watch the Throne*, representing the best, hottest, and most exclusive labels isn't just standard practice for a rapper—it's how you earn respect. With A\$AP Rocky and Frank Ocean's recently dropped "Raf" making the rounds, its hyper-catchy hook isn't just a catchphrase perfect for fashion nerds—it's a symbol of how hip-hop's approach to the fashion world has completely evolved.

Anyone who has listened to even a modicum of rap will be able to recount a bar or two dripping in designer names. Living in an era of hip-hop that's dominated by Kanye West's ever-expanding influence, the intersection between fashion and rap is more obvious than ever.

As a musical art form that is—at least in part—about bold confidence, status, and staking a claim for the sake of respect, high-fashion's perceived inaccessibility makes it the perfect platform for flexing. It's essentially a club with an exorbitant price of admission—one you pay

for every piece you buy. A physical symbol of "have" and "have not," wearing high-fashion is as much a reminder of how much money you make as it is a declaration of personal style. What's different about today's rappers—something especially illustrated within the multiple verses of "Raf"—is that simply owning a fashion designer's garments isn't enough; you have to know everything about what you're rocking to the fine details.

Say what you will about white girl rappers, but what separates a song like "Raf" from something like the equally fashion-inflected and hooky (but poorly aged) "Gucci Gucci" is that the brag comes in having significant knowledge of the designer before the masses. Kreyshawn's thesis is she avoids wearing designers because it makes her look basic, but rap style's new guard add an extra layer: being in-the-know about a designer before he or she blows up is the true stunt. It's not a battle of style, it's a battle of cultural taste and ability to foresee fashion trends.

The recipe is simple: insert well-known designer name, brag about housing a ton of said label within your personal wardrobe, repeat. "Raf" certainly embodies that high-

fashion lyrical habit (looking, with all due respect, at Quavo's verse), but the best lines within Rocky's new single often point out that most don't really even understand who Raf Simons is. With fashion fanatic (and Grailed fiend) Playboi Carti echoing in the background, "Raf"'s first lines address this thinking directly: "You don't even gotta ask (For what?) / What are those? What is that? (For y'all).

Turning aspirational purchases into actual ones is par for the course for people who finally "make it," and in the world of hip-hop, bragging about blowing cash on clothes is practically second nature. But while countless classics brag about owning high-fashion, few have actually flexed their fashion knowledge and made it as cool as A\$AP Rocky. Just remember, if you happen to catch Rocky in public, please don't touch his Raf ■

“

Please don't touch my 'Raf.'



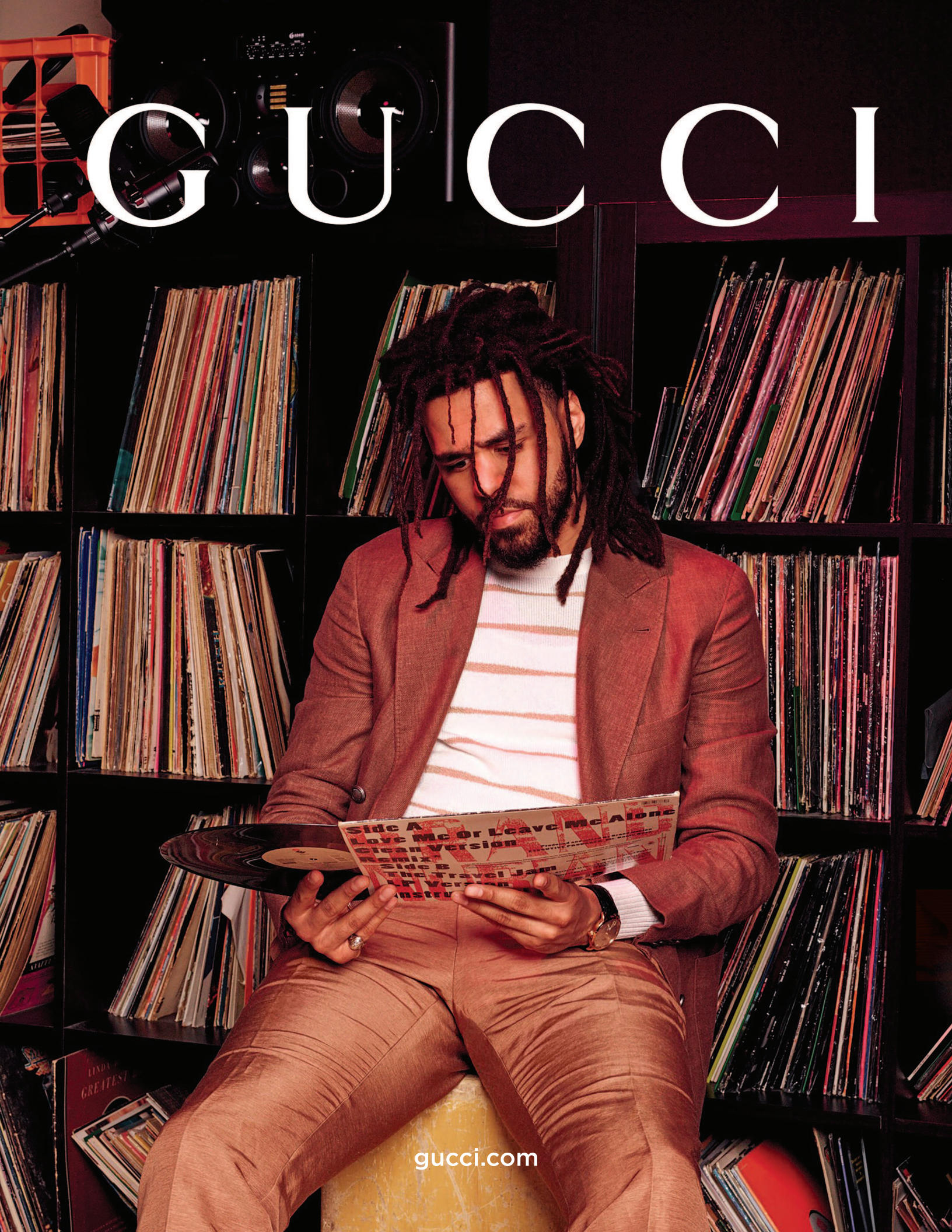








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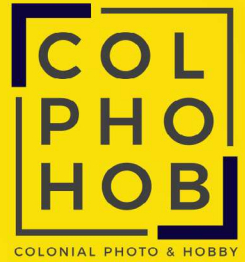
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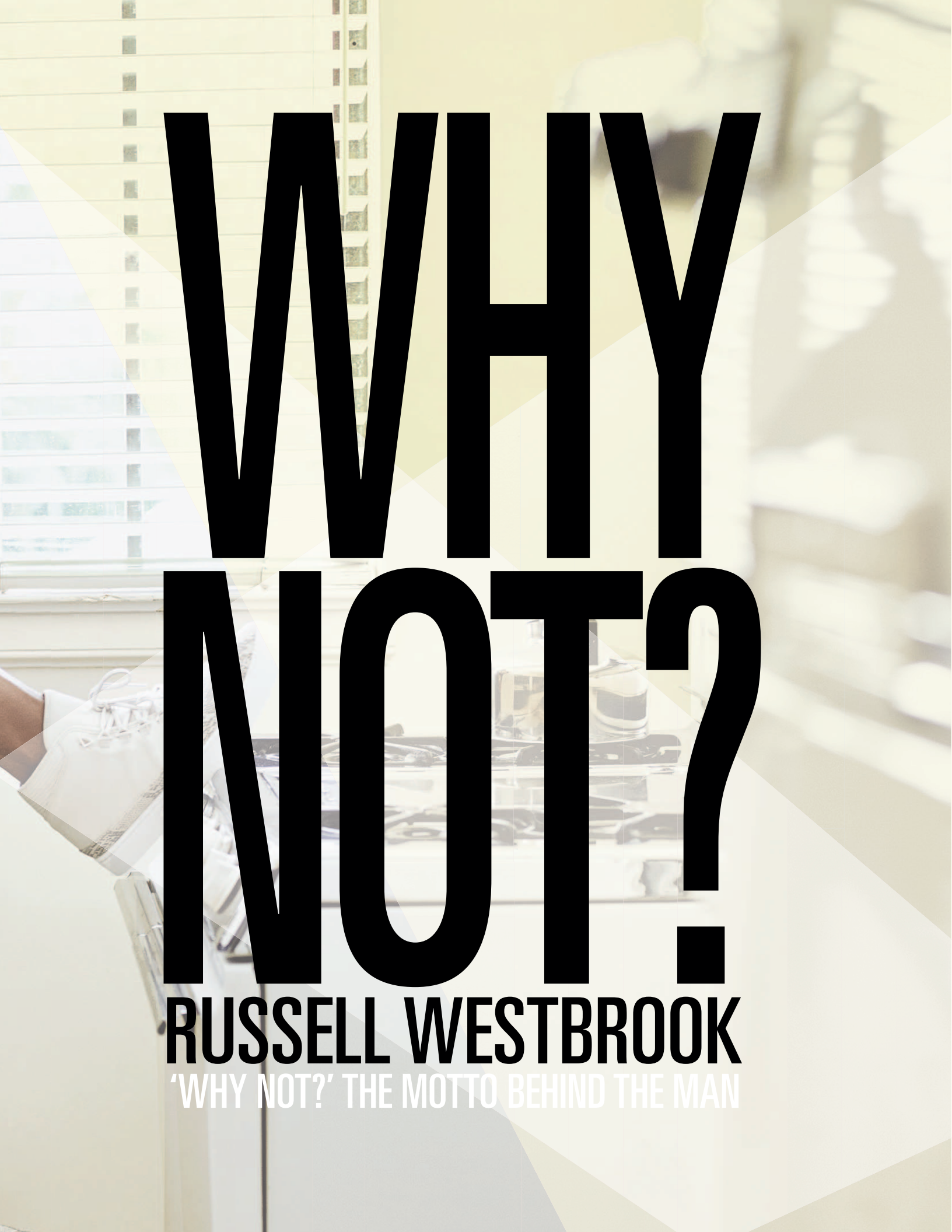
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# WHY NOT?

**RUSSELL WESTBROOK**

'WHY NOT?' THE MOTTO BEHIND THE MAN







If you know one thing about Westbrook, it's probably his hyperaggressive, shoot-first, baseline-to-baseline style of play. For a few months this spring, en route to winning the NBA scoring title, he was so phenomenally good, racking up triple-doubles almost every night, that he took over the opening block of ESPN's SportsCenter in the same way Donald Trump takes over a GOP presidential debate. You tuned in to witness the sheer majesty of the performance. If you know two things about Westbrook, the second is probably the glasses. During the 2012 NBA Finals, when the Thunder took on the Miami Heat, he showed up at a news conference in a colorful Prada shirt and lensless red specs—"nerd glasses," the press dubbed them—that had a sudden, seismic effect on the sports world and brought together Westbrook's two great passions: basketball and fashion.

*Basketball and fashion.* These two worlds intersected only occasionally before 2012. Stylewise, pro sports was a wasteland. Turn on ESPN even today, and you're confronted by a ghastly array of baggy four-button suits, Chris Berman wearing neckties seemingly on a dare, and Merrill Hoge in starched collars, with tie knots as big as satin throw pillows. The jock code frowned on fashion. So when Westbrook wore his famous glasses, the jocks reacted as jocks do—with mockery. The next day, Charles Barkley and the crew of TNT's *Inside the NBA* donned red glasses to tweak Westbrook's unique style. (Barkley, who's as smooth and round as a 400-pound Milk Dud, typically shrouds himself in suits that uncannily resembles gabardine muumuu.)

**B**ut here's what happened next—a ton of NBA players, and plenty of other people, too, started wearing lensless frames. The Prada shirt sold out. Westbrook watched with amusement. "I started wearing frames back in middle school," he says, a few days after the Givenchy show. "I used to pick 'em out for \$2 a pair at thrift stores around the neighborhood. I've always liked to curate my own look, go with what I like. I'm not a big follower."

Today, pro sports is in the midst of a style renaissance, and the NBA is its most fashion-forward league. Every night, superstars such as LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, and Amar'e Stoudemire turn the postgame news conference into a runway, greeting the cameras in Michael Bastian, Givenchy, or Alexander Wang. Offseason, you're as likely to spot them in Paris or Milan as in the gym.

But no athlete in any sport has cultivated a more distinctive style than Westbrook. Head-to-toe monochrome red outfits? Check. Elephant-print jackets? Sure. Acid-washed coverall shorts? Wore 'em on Jimmy Kimmel Live in September. (Think I exaggerate? Check out @russwest44 on Instagram.) Westbrook loves mixing high fashion and low, pairing couture with H&M. He won't hesitate to take scissors to a \$2,000 shirt if the mood strikes. His outré style has become so famous that when he got married in August,

It was dusk at Pier 26 in Manhattan when the monk began to chant, a deep, rolling vibrato you could feel in the pit of your belly. Across the flat, open expanse of the pier, which juts out into the Hudson River, a friar in a long tunic stood atop an open-air staircase, holding a pair of birch saplings. He gazed toward a fully clothed woman beneath a running shower on the roof of a tin shanty and, beyond her, a pair of identically dressed bearded men, one clutching the other in his arms like a teddy bear.

For the uninitiated, the experience was like waking up in a surrealist painting or discovering you'd ingested a lot of peyote. For Russell Westbrook, All-Star point guard for the Oklahoma City Thunder, it was just another fashion show, albeit the most hotly anticipated of this fall's New York Fashion Week: Givenchy was unveiling its 2016 spring line. Westbrook, 26, wearing a look of rapt interest, had planted himself at the runway's edge alongside Kim Kardashian, Kanye West, and Vogue's Anna Wintour. Afterward, he hustled backstage to pay his respects to the French label's creative director, Riccardo Tisci. "Every time I walk into a fashion show, I get excited," he says.











# RUSSELL WESTBROOK

the ESPN headline read: “Russell Westbrook Gets Married, Wears Regular Tux.” (It was a Tom Ford.)

Jock traditionalists, it should be noted, have struggled to accept the new fashion movement and its leading icon. “He wears weird s---,” Kobe Bryant said of Westbrook last year. “It’s a generational thing. I’m glad I didn’t grow up in his generation.” On YouTube, Westbrook’s outfits are a source of steady fascination.

Westbrook, who possesses the confidence to wear hot-pink pants, laughs off all of this, which he attributes to insecurity. “Sometimes people ask me jokingly for style advice, but I know they mean it seriously,” he says. He’s happy to oblige. Long before the NBA, back when he was still scouting \$2 frames, Westbrook harbored an ambition to one day run his own fashion empire. And not just the star athlete’s typical sneakers-and-video-games franchise, though he has these covered. (Nike sells his shoes, and Electronic Arts put him on the cover of NBA Live 16.)

Westbrook had in mind full-on couture. Through a partnership with high-end retailer Barneys New York, he’s built a brand, Russell Westbrook XO, under which he’s created, with premier designers, everything the modern man of means requires. There’s clothing (with Public School), slippers (Del Toro), fragrance (Byredo), luggage (Globe-Trotter), and jewelry (Jennifer Fisher). He’s also introducing Nike’s multibillion-dollar Jordan Brand, previously known for midpriced athletic wear, to Barneys’s upscale clientele, with pieces he designed, such as a \$500 white flight suit by Jordan Brand.

Born in Long Beach, Calif., Westbrook may have shown more early promise as a fashion figure than a ballplayer. When he arrived at Leuzinger High School in Lawndale, his size 14 feet supported a mere 140-pound, 5-foot-8 frame, and he spent most games riding the bench. But he carefully cultivated a look. Along with the frames, FUBU’s Fat Albert line was an early preoccupation for a young Westbrook.

By senior year, Westbrook had sprouted to 6-foot-2, 180 pounds, and become the starting point guard. But he wasn’t heavily recruited by major schools. Only when UCLA lost its star shooting guard in the 2006 NBA draft did the school’s coach, Ben Howland, make a late scholarship offer that Westbrook accepted. Even then, he was a bit different. He chose “0” for his uniform number and studied fashion blogs and magazines. “In college, a lot of kids don’t do this,” he says, “but I enjoyed dressing up and going to class and getting good grades. Nobody paid much attention then.” They do now, though Westbrook would probably still spend an hour dressing before heading to a game, cycling through four or five outfits, even if they didn’t.

He’s emerging as the creative force he’s always wanted to be at the exact moment when the top labels have become smitten with professional athletes. “We all look to someone for style references,” says Tom Kalendarian, executive vice president at Barneys. “It’s athletes like Russ who are delivering that in the same way



**“I’M NOT  
A BIG  
FOLLOWER**

musicians and actors once did. They’re making and setting the trends, not just following them.

You can see an extension of Westbrook’s Why not? mentality in his sartorial decisions. In his clothes, Westbrook evinces his singular self-possession—his special vision, his chameleonic openness, his complete lack of regard for what anyone else thinks. Sometimes he wears a T-shirt and jeans. Sometimes he shows up in eyeglasses without lenses. Sometimes he pulls on what looks to be a quilted potato sack. There are no limits to his choices in clothes, because he has money and exposure without constraints, and designers know there’s a good chance he’ll wear what they mail him (he doesn’t repeat looks, he needs options—it’s math). His resoluteness in his own vision, his tunneled self-assurance, is so pure that it edges up to a sort of deeply beneficial psychosis. Just a little bit broken from reality. Which is maybe what people mean when

they say Westbrook plays crazy, dresses crazy.

“And that’s why a stylist, for me, is just a waste of money,” Westbrook says. “It would take away from my creative side. And the most important thing about fashion is being creative and being able to have your own ideas.” As a professional basketball player in the 2010s, one of the things you have to do is decide whether you’re going to hire a stylist to make your fashion choices for you. If you want to keep up in a league that’s gotten serious about clothes—and you’re not Westbrook—it’s wise to seek professional help. “Sometimes you can tell who stylists are working with, because a lot of guys will start dressing the same. But I don’t pay much mind either way.” At Barneys, I watch him recite his varying sizes for several different brands (without consulting an Excel spreadsheet or anything). He has recall for specific outfits—again, he aims to never wear the same combination of clothes more than once—







# RUSSELL WESTBROOK

in much the same way basketball players can recall a given play from years before. And he's always on the lookout for statement pieces that he can parcel out through the season (instantly relegating those he's worn to the giveaway pile). When he can, he makes a point to squeeze in front-row appearances at Fashion Weeks. New York. Milan. Paris. "I like making sure I'm there, because a lot of that stuff on the runways never makes it to the stores," he says. "And I'm able to see, like, different colors, how they go together, different color palettes, different fabrics, how they go with each other, how they link, how they flow, how they look on people."

He creates his own collections for Barneys, though he's interested in more than just clothes—he's at his most animated when talking about design of any sort. He loves traveling, not because of the sites but because of the exposure to design. In hotels. In restaurants. From away games in Minneapolis to sponsorship obligations in Hong Kong. "I get ideas from everything. Just from everyday walking around. Looking at people. Just from everything. I see colors, women, men—traveling, I get ideas from all over the place, just because I think that's the best way to do it," he says. "Like the carpets in hotels. How it works with the walls. The artwork. I had a great idea when I was in China this summer, this thing going on on the street, and I was just like, Man, I'm going to design something exactly like that. I can't tell you at the moment. But for my next collection, when I do it, it's gonna be just like that. To me, it's just exciting, 'cause I'm able to see different things and come back.... I can't draw, but someone who can draw, I'm able to explain to someone exactly what I want to do."

"The thing about me you have to know is, I don't care what other people are doing. I. Don't. Care. I'm so busy worried about how I can improve, I just don't have time to worry about what any other person is doing."

I was asking about how he feels he stacks up against the best players, though I realized his answer could have applied to nearly any subject related to the opinions of others. Media. Fans. Coaches. Rivals. I keep thinking about that gesture—the in-one-ear-out-the-other-roll-off-the-back hybrid of disregard. Imagine being so unaffected by other people that you were able to direct every moment, every thought, into self-improvement. All that collateral energy lost to FOMO and envy and the validation of strangers. All that precious time spent worrying about a scoreboard to a game no one else knows is being played. Imagine if all those forces could be bagged up and cinched with a twisty tie and sealed inside your brain and body for only you to expend. The world might perceive you as a little closed off. A little secretive, a little untrusting, maybe even a little crazy. But, holy shit, would you be good at being you. At doing what you do. Conditions change, teammates turn over, trying circumstances present themselves. But because you've been Why not?-ing your way here your entire life, it's no big thing. ■





# VIBES

1989

TYLER, THE CREATOR  
BREAKS DOWN HIS  
LATEST RELEASE NO.1  
"IGOR" AND MORE

COLE WORLD: RAP'S TOP TIER  
IN HIP-HOP



# J. COLE THE BUCK SYSTEM



**And other secrets of J. Cole's unorthodox path to rap's top tier.**

*Story* LAWRENCE PERRY  
*Photography* AWOL ERIZKU  
*Styling* DALIT GWENNA  
*Assistant* CHAZ PILARCHIK



# Y

ou can tell how famous someone is by the number of people assembled in a room, setting things up, ready to spring into action at the exact moment of their arrival. J. Cole has

about 12 waiting for him at a studio on the Friday of NBA All-Star Weekend in Charlotte, North Carolina. While he's over at Spectrum Center, finalizing details for his halftime performance on Sunday night, his team has turned a mellow lounge space into a West Elm-decorated war room, preparing to film a few interviews for a documentary he's working on.

A makeup artist gently cleans her brushes, somewhere someone is audibly losing at Ping-Pong, a cameraman angles a tripod to J. Cole height, several people are typing. He enters imperceptibly, all Gumby limbs and soft energy, setting off a slow ripple of awareness as people realize he's there. He makes his way around the room, shaking hands, slapping palms, clapping backs, bumping chests. He pauses and asks if anybody ordered him lunch. Sandwiches freeze on their journey to mouths. Everyone avoids eye contact for a tremulous second, hoping he doesn't notice how the room smells overwhelmingly of french fries, because no, nobody ordered J. Cole lunch.

It's all good, he says, as someone insists he eat the chicken sandwich belonging to the unlucky bastard who's stepped out to find a phone charger. Someone puts his otherwise decorative Jordans to their intended athletic use, running to get a menu for him.

All-Star Weekend is a big bang-level collision of NBA and hip-hop celebrity, resulting in a supernova of spectacle and professional obligations. Some people thrive—attending every event from the big game to a runway show for celebrity babies. But for Cole, it's a weekend dense with the aspects of fame that make him uncomfortable. The day before, he made the nearly three-hour drive from his couch, his wife, and their toddler son in Raleigh to fulfill the duties required of a local hero performing at a major event in his home state.

He sighs. "Everybody hits me up. I got people texting me, like, 'Bro, I can't believe you're performing the All-Star Game halftime show. Ain't that so crazy?' In my mind, I'm just like, 'Bro, this feels like a job—you know what I mean?'" J. Cole is social, for sure—he's loved going out ever since going out meant chasing girls at the skating rink. But he's notoriously introverted when it comes to events like this. "I don't like center-of-attention-type moments," he says. "Like the camera, mad people, the world watching the arena, and I have to do something right."

His lunch finally in front of him, Cole propels his long dreads out of the way and takes a huge bite of his burger. He's projecting some old anxieties, he explains. In 2012 he played in the All-Star Weekend's celebrity game and avoided the spotlight for most of his time on

the court. "It's funny. I had Kevin Hart close to me, and I noticed he was like purposely trying to get in the camera. He wasn't as big as he is now. He had this energy that like, 'You're gonna see me.' Me on the other hand, nah..." he trails off, wiping ketchup off a single lock that didn't make it to safety. "It feels like an invasion of privacy."

J. Cole might be a famous musician, but in some ways he tries to live life like he's not. Home is in North Carolina, where he can play basketball at a local gym for hours without being disturbed. Fans and gossip blogs didn't know he was married until director Ryan Coogler accidentally revealed it in an interview. This reticence for attention can be read as a specific kind of obstinacy. He's famously uncompromising when it comes to his success. He achieves it on his terms: He doesn't work with a lot of other artists, he doesn't drop a lot of singles, he doesn't do a lot of press. He favors fan-centric releases, like surprise listening parties or Apple Music pre-order pages that spring up just before an album is available, over advance announcements (and did so long before it was the prevailing business model). And he doesn't fulfill the traditional expectations of a career in music, eschewing showier displays of status. He tried stardom the conventional way, retreated, retooled, and then achieved real success by trying it again.

For someone so notoriously reserved, Cole's willingness to submit to three days of privacy invasion might seem to signal some evolution in his relationship to fame, but that's not quite it, he corrects me. It's not fame he's embracing, just a new sense of openness. "I'm trying not to be as stubborn about it all," he explains.

It's like this, he says, quickly spinning a parable so I can understand him. Recently he got some time to travel with his family. They went to Maui. He really wanted to just chill, but the others wanted to do the only thing you're truly supposed to do when you're a tourist in Maui: take the road to Hana to see a majestic waterfall. "I never wanna do excursions. It feels like work. It's like, I ain't trying to get up at 6 A.M., take the three-hour drive to where we're going hiking." Years ago, he might have insisted on hanging back and going to the beach alone. But he realized, "I got somebody I care about saying, 'Come on, like, we need to do this.'" So he did. "I realize, like, memories come from getting out of my comfort zone—great memories."

Now, at 34, one might say, J. Cole is undertaking the professional equivalent of a journey up the road to Hana. Appearing here at the All-Star Game is just one move in a course correction he seems to be making (and making very much on his own terms). He's suddenly collaborating with other artists, especially those on his own Dreamville label; he's forming new connections to the SoundCloud set that once confused him; he's more active on Twitter; he even recently bought a place in New York City.

"I've reached a point in my life," he tells me, "where I'm like, 'How long am I gonna be doing this for?' I'm starting to realize like, oh shit—let's say I stopped this year. I would feel

like I missed out on certain experiences, you know? Working with certain artists, being more collaborative, making more friends out of peers, making certain memories that I feel like if I don't, I'm gonna regret it one day."

It's like this, he says, quickly spinning a parable so I can understand him. Recently he got some time to travel with his family. They went to Maui. He really wanted to just chill, but the others wanted to do the only thing you're truly supposed to do when you're a tourist in Maui: take the road to Hana to see a majestic waterfall. "I never wanna do excursions. It feels like work. It's like, I ain't trying to get up at 6 A.M., take the three-hour drive to where we're going hiking." Years ago, he might have insisted on hanging back and going to the beach alone. But he realized, "I got somebody I care about saying, 'Come on, like, we need to do this.'" So he did. "I realize, like, memories come from getting out of my comfort zone—great memories."

Now, at 34, one might say, J. Cole is undertaking the professional equivalent of a journey up the road to Hana. Appearing here at the All-Star Game is just one move in a course correction he seems to be making (and making very much on his own terms). He's suddenly collaborating with other artists, especially those on his own Dreamville label; he's forming new connections to the SoundCloud set that once confused him; he's more active on Twitter; he even recently bought a place in New York City.

"I've reached a point in my life," he tells me, "where I'm like, 'How long am I gonna be doing this for?' I'm starting to realize like, oh shit—let's say I stopped this year. I would feel like I missed out on certain experiences, you know? Working with certain artists, being more collaborative, making more friends out of peers, making certain memories that I feel like if I don't, I'm gonna regret it one day."

So if this were Cole's last year making music, how would he feel? (Don't worry, he assures me, he's not quite ready to stop—even if fans have a trick-knee-before-it-rains feeling that his next album might be his last.) Put simply, J. Cole is one of the most popular rap artists of this generation. His two early mixtapes, *The Warm Up* and *Friday Night Lights*, are considered classics. He's released five albums, all of them platinum-certified chartbusters. Three of these went platinum with no features—as in, without the help of appearances by other artists. To J. Cole diehards, this is a point of

**"Everybody hits me up. I got people texting me, like, 'Bro, I can't believe you're performing the All-Star Game halftime show. Ain't that so crazy?' In my mind, I'm just like, 'Bro, this feels like a job—you know what I mean?'"**



pride they love to recite in response to a mention of “Drake” or “Kendrick” or any other name in the “generation’s best rapper” debate. So much so that the phrase “J. Cole went platinum with no features” has become a persistent slogan, like something advertising execs dreamed up around a conference table. “I was loving it,” he says. “I was like, ‘Word up—this is funny as hell.’ But the second or third time, I was like, ‘All right, it’s almost embarrassing now.’ Like, ‘All right, man, y’all gonna make me put a feature on the album just so this shit can stop.’”

There’s a shadow version of that phrase, too, though: J. Cole went platinum with no Grammys. It’s always a little surprising to remember that. Especially since his well-received last album, *KOD*, broke multiple streaming records on Spotify and Apple Music.

Cole has stopped letting it bother him. In fact, he’s found a way to be grateful that his nomination in 2012 for best new artist didn’t result in a win (which he desperately wanted at the time). “It would’ve been disastrous for me, because subconsciously it would’ve been sending me a signal of like ‘Okay, I am supposed to be this guy.’ But I would’ve been the dude that had that one great album and then fizzled out.”

He describes his evolution in thinking with the sort of emotional intelligence associated with people who discuss how often they meditate. “I’m not supposed to have a Grammy, you know what I mean?” he says. “At least not right now, and maybe never. And if that happens, then that’s just how it was supposed to be.” Cole has this way of talking to people. When it’s time to really talk, like mind-meld talk, he’ll gently touch a knee, a forearm, a shoulder. He has a habit of grasping at his chest and then taking those same hands and gesturing emphatically toward my heart, like he’s trying to inject what he means right into me. He asks questions and then follow-up questions.

**“Everybody hits me up. I got people texting me, like, ‘Bro, I can’t believe you’re performing the All-Star Game halftime show. Ain’t that so crazy?’ In my mind, I’m just like, ‘Bro, this feels like a job—you know what I mean?’ ”**

(Coincidentally, or prophetically, one of his early rap monikers was *Therapist*.) After a while, he rises to pull on a black hoodie and drifts into another corner of the room, where he sits in the middle of the group and slouches low in a leather chair. All the bodies in the room gradually shift so their knees are pointing in his direction, like a school of fish instinctively swimming toward the same point. He grabs an acoustic guitar that’s usually decorative and starts to strum. Even while still, he looks pensive, like he’s solving all the problems all the time—it’s his heavy brow. It gives him resting worry face.

He’s interrupted by a phone call, Colin Kaepernick

on FaceTime. He greets Kaepernick with big, warm congratulations. News had just broken a few hours ago that Kaepernick had agreed to settle his lawsuit against the NFL—for a payday some sources estimate could be as high as \$100 million.

“You’re buying me dinner when I’m in New York,” Cole says with a laugh. After about ten minutes of him mm-hmm-ing while the two presumably discuss the headlines, Cole hangs up. They’ve been cut short by a bad connection. The room around him starts debating Kaepernick’s choice to settle rather than go to court. Was he selling out, or was he being smart? Did the NFL get off easy? “Listen, justice was served,” Cole says, noting the wisdom in Kaepernick’s move. “This man got his money, know what I mean? Plus,” Cole speculates, “he’ll probably play again.”

Maybe it’s the nonchalant way he’s plucking guitar strings while he talks, but Cole’s presence has the same effect as strong indica. Everyone’s relaxed and in a heady space, trying to draw profound conclusions from pop culture. It feels like a glimpse of how Cole must have held court in his dorm room at St. John’s University in Queens: a little self-serious, a little goofy, reasonably asserting that he’s right—every sapiosexual’s wet dream, basically.

The next afternoon, Cole and other Dreamville artists are hosting a brunch in support of the label, and by 4 P.M. the event has reached full-day party—the tequila near the ice luge is running dangerously low. It’s cold for Charlotte, even for February, and I find myself huddled over a fire pit next to Amin El-Hassan, the cousin of Cole’s manager, Ibrahim “Ib” Hamad. They’ve all been friends since Cole and Ib were both at St. John’s, where Cole was studying when he recorded his first mixtape, *The Come-Up*, in 2007. Ib helped send copies to music blogs, radio stations, record labels, and his cousin Amin, who had started working for the Phoenix Suns and who decided to place Cole’s CD on the chair of every player on the roster.

According to Amin, the plan to get the music out worked. Amar’e Stoudemire loved what he heard and wanted to sign Cole to his label, Hypocalypto. Amin couldn’t believe it. He called Ib to deliver the news that he thought would make Cole’s career. Amin laughs now, acknowledging that his intervention really wasn’t needed: “Ib said, ‘Oh, thanks, man, but we’ve got some bigger fish to fry.’”

The bigger fish was Jay-Z, who signed Cole to Roc-A-Fella in 2009, making him Patient Zero for the nascent label. Jay-Z’s endorsement, it seemed, all but guaranteed success. But Cole realized he wasn’t going to put out an album immediately. He had to wait. The label, it seemed, had its formula: single, radio play, album. Cole couldn’t release an album until he had a single. “I’d never thought about a single before—I didn’t even care,” he says. “I kinda wanted my first album to be, like, an undeniable classic, and I didn’t care if it sold.” ■







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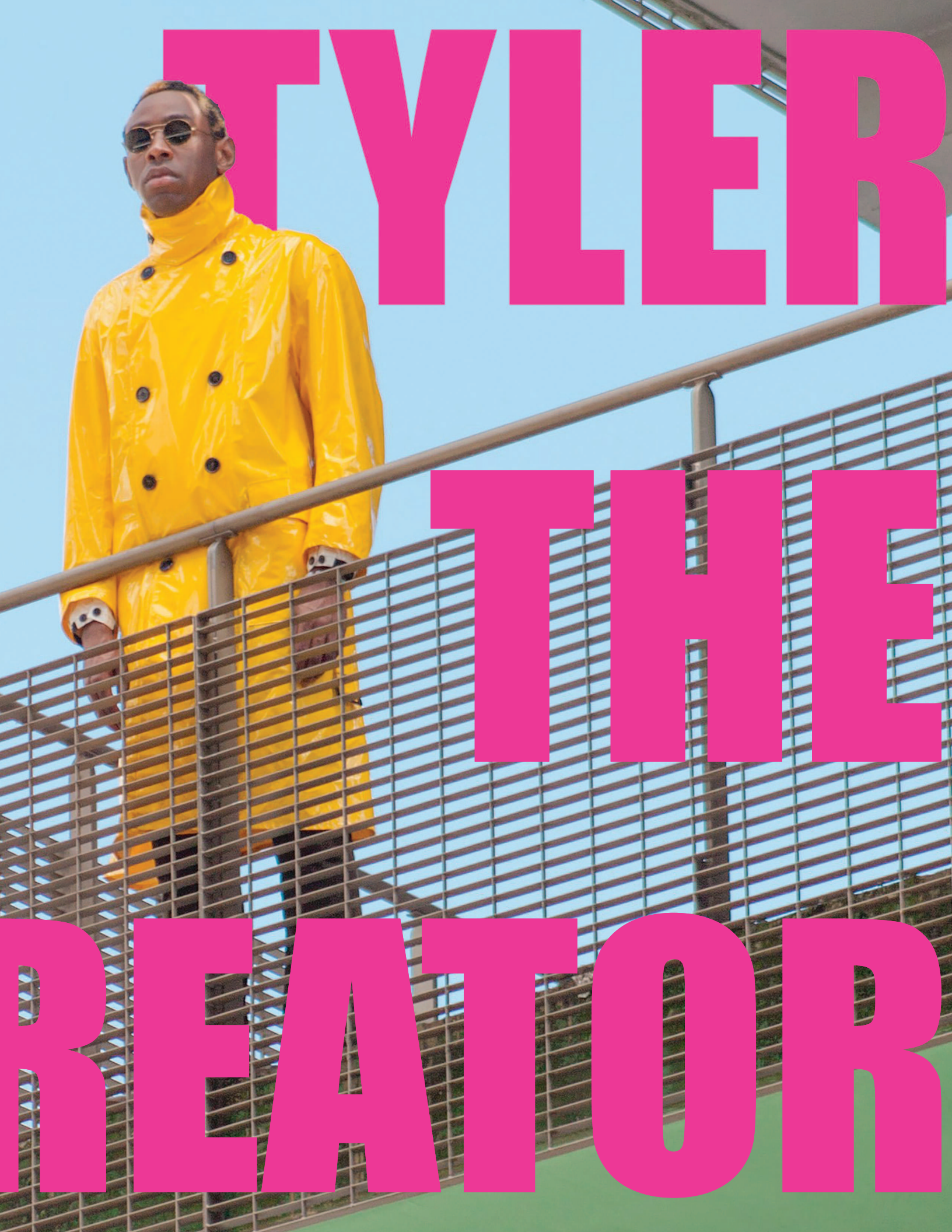
# SUGGAR

**In pursuit of  
cookies, clothes,  
and maybe  
even a little  
maturity with  
pop culture's  
kaleidoscopic  
visionary,**

By Lawrence Perry  
Photographed by Matthfew Venot  
Styled by Mobolaji Dawdon

# HIGH C





**TYLER**

**THE**

**CREATOR**



**H**ow many teenagers with global hype are given the chance to grow? There are too many variables in the music industry, too many constantly shifting tides for patience to dictate decision-making. And yet, here's Tyler Okonma, having survived ten years of tumultuous record releases, country-wide ban lists, and middle-America protest, creating the best music of his life.

Okonma, who's known virtually everywhere as Tyler, the Creator, is that outlier. Not only did he have

time and albums at his disposal to find his voice, he used those platforms to experiment without fear of consequence. It was impossible for the young rapper to live up to the hype of his scene-busting 2009 mixtape *Bastard*, but the next 2011's *Goblin* was a sometimes ecstatic, sometimes flawed debut that produced a legitimate breakthrough hit in "Yonkers." The album also begot serious controversy for Tyler's homophobic language and general disregard for political correctness.

In hindsight, Tyler's relationship with slurs is more complicated than even he let it on to be, but alongside debates of *Goblin*'s merits were talks of silencing Tyler for his offensive language. *Goblin*'s 2013 follow-up, *Wolf*, displayed greater consistency from Tyler, if not necessarily a huge amount of personal maturation. *Wolf* trod much the same territory as its predecessor and found Tyler doubling down on his outlandishness almost as a defense mechanism. It's a record that didn't display an expanded palette as much as reiterate what Tyler did best -- gorgeous beats, searing attacks on enemies, and struggles with celebrity.

Then there was 2015's *Cherry Bomb*, two years after that, which was a Rorschach test for Tyler fans. With *Cherry Bomb*, the album represented whatever you thought about Tyler: Either he was brash, offensive, and overhyped, or a DIY genius with ideas bursting at the seams -- an energy too radical for cynics to understand. It presented a fork for Tyler: Either dive deeper into his me-against-the-world mentality, or embrace a more introspective attitude towards his work, providing listeners a behind-the-scenes look into the type of person the rapper wanted to become.

With fourth official album *Flower Boy* in 2017, Tyler did the latter, to startling effects. The album was released to near unanimous acclaim, his first album whose reception was nearly unequivocally positive, rather than divisive. The inflammatory raps just to egg on a response disappeared, and in its place was a deeper look into the evolution of a person and artist. Tyler hadn't changed, he just took himself at face value. Instead of using his music as a reactionary measure against his critics, he presented himself as he wished to be on *Flower Boy*, and we all embraced it -- because Tyler is damn charming when he wants to be.

Tyler, the Creator defined his early presence through his contrarianism. He says it on *Goblin*'s first single, "Yonkers:" "I'm a fuckin' walkin' paradox/ No I'm not/ Threesomes with a fuckin' triceratops." Tyler was the opposite of whatever we said, and he seemed to feed off the conflict. The teenage troll has slowly grown, like so many of us do, into a lovesick twenty-something. And as such, with his just released *IGOR*,







he's at his best: a little broken, a little unburdened, entirely himself.

Despite the somewhat up-and-down trajectory of his career, Tyler was never going to fail -- he's always been too talented. Tyler's early records never totally outshined those of his West Coast peers (and/or Odd Future cohorts): Frank Ocean's a better songwriter, Earl Sweatshirt's a better rapper, Vince Staples is funnier. But Tyler still brought all three of those skills to the table, and the highs of *Goblin*, *Wolf*, and *Cherry Bomb* hinted at something shape-shifting. *Flower Boy* was that something -- and with *IGOR*, he's proven that his newfound consistency and earnestness wasn't a fluke.

Following up your most successful record to date with a release that doubles down on your experimental instincts isn't necessarily the safest bet. But here's Tyler, the Creator gearing up for a Governor's Ball headlining set next month, on the heels of his densest, weirdest, and messiest album to date. It's also superlatively gorgeous and mesmerizing.

With these variables -- and considering Tyler is, among many other things, a master of his own hype -- every move surrounding the release of *IGOR* makes his rise to hip-hop's elite class of solo stars almost inevitable.

First, there's the guestlist -- or, more accurately, the lack of one. The album is a puzzle that slowly builds itself, revealing voices and ideas the more one becomes acquainted with its tics. There's the disembodied voice of Lil Uzi Vert on opener "IGOR'S THEME," not exactly the discernible Uzi we're used to, just weird enough to cause a double take. This all seems intentional. The names of this album's supporting cast are huge: We get Uzi and Playboi Carti, Solange and Kanye West. However, none of these artists are listed as features on the Spotify tracklist -- Tyler dropped Easter eggs, but if you really want to dig into the voices behind the music, you have to do your research. This is a record that merits a deep dive, and as such, people are diving in.

*IGOR* sounds like a mixtape. The lack of an official guestlist, the quick



run-up to release date, the “first studio take after a demo” feel to the whole record; it all hints at a messiness, a lack of pretension. It’s a masterclass in understated importance. This record means something, but only if you get it. If you don’t, well, it’s just another tape in a year.

There’s a run at IGOR’s center where each song’s momentum seems to propel him forward emotionally. It’s during this stretch that Tyler is at his most creatively fluid, as on “A BOY IS A GUN\*,” where he flattens his voice to sing “gun,” sounding like a laser cutting across the track and maybe also through his own psyche. Combined with the Kanye-assisted “PUPPET,” these tracks in their varied tone and tempo reflect the volatility of Tyler’s emotions across IGOR. Most songs don’t even have a natural ending, they just snap off, like someone pulled the aux cord abruptly.

IGOR may be unsettled but it never feels restless. As Tyler grapples with uncertainty and unfulfillment, he delivers an album that feels like it is suspended in midair. It reminds me of Solange’s *When I Get Home* or King Krule’s *The Ooz*, albums that succeed in communicating mood as their own sense of logic. Tyler’s interpretation of this sort of stream-

of-consciousness feels weightless. The whole album is sustained by mutating, colorful chords, impressionistic cracks in tonality. On top of that, Tyler’s synthetic falsetto singing adds a surreal element to IGOR. The lines between desire and reality and internal monologue and human conversation all become blurred.

Tyler, the Creator never shied away from sharing what he thought his life was missing. “I ain’t got no fucking money,” he yelled simply enough on the inimitable “Radicals,” an early Odd Future anthem. And when he got what he thought he wanted, he flaunted it: “Also stuck with a beautiful home with a case of stairs,” he taunted his father on “Answer.” IGOR is the first time Tyler has not been motivated by some absence because he lost a bit of himself in someone else. “ARE WE STILL FRIENDS?,” the album’s rough and honeyed send-off, is Tyler’s final attempt at salvaging his relationship. He’s finally without his beau and asks for the compromise of friendship. The track, as with many on IGOR, ends sharply with a synth never resolving its buzz. There’s nothing left to say when you’ve given all of yourself away. ■















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# DELICIOUS

1989

## ANDERSON .PAAK IS IN THE BUILDING

THE CROWN BELONGS HOME AS AMERICA BREWS UP THE SOME OF THE BEST BREWERIES IN CRAFT BEER  
ORLANDO'S NEW HOT SPOT FOR DELICIOUS RAMEN



# AMERICAN



# THIRST

BY: LAWRENCE PERRY

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SHOREFIRE



**We're in the Midst of an American Beer Revolution.** Fellow countrymen, there has never been a better time to drink domestically—for we now brew the most innovative and mind-bogglingly flavorful beer on the planet. Better than German beer? you ask. Yes, better. What about those Trappist monks in Belgium? They make good beer! Yes, they do. But ours is better. Renegade American brewers have devoted their lives to blowing up the old European recipes in search of something new, and over time that irreverence has become our signature. American beer is not a style, per se. It's a philosophy—one founded on improvisation with offbeat ingredients and radical brewing techniques. Sometimes that leads to unusual beers. Other times it just leads to unusually good ones.

**Beer Hotels Are Now a Thing.** The gonzo brewery Dogfish Head—which makes its beers with foodstuffs like green raisins, lime peels, parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme—has established a beachhead near the Delaware shore with the 16-room Dogfish Inn. Checking in? Expect daily lawn games and nightly drinking sessions around the bonfire. Inside, every room gets a fridge, a hand soap made from IPA, and a set of beach chairs—basically everything you need for a beer-cation, right down to the Advil in the mini-bar.

**American Ingenuity Created This Cocktail.** You are going to have to trust us on this because it involves the words “blueberry vodka,” but we promise that the mad geniuses at Cisco Brewers on Nantucket have invented the next great beer cocktail. It's called the Blue Haired Lady, and like most actual blue-haired ladies we've met, it is strong and sweet and wild and loose. To make one, top a 12-ounce pour of Cisco's Grey Lady Ale with a 1.5-ounce floater of blueberry vodka from Triple Eight, Cisco's sister distillery. Try it yourself. We're not crazy, right?

**Fruit Beer Doesn't Have to Taste Fruity.** Unless they're pumped full of artificial flavoring agents—in which case: gross—a lot of fruit beers are crisp and dry rather than sickly sweet. When you're sprawled out on a picnic blanket with a sandwich and a bag of chips, all you want out of life is Stillwater's Insetto (made with real plums) or 21st Amendment Brewery's Hell or High Watermelon (made with... duh).

**You Can Skip Your Local Beer Festival...** Sure, a beerfest *sounds* like a good idea, but crowding into a convention hall to line up for thimble-sized pours has gotta be the worst way to drink. For starters, the venues smell like Staples. But the bigger problem is palate fatigue, which is a 100 percent real thing that happens when you chase your smoked-oyster stout with a peanut-butter-and-jelly porter. Your taste buds just stop firing properly, leaving you to helplessly swish and gargle your beer in a doomed attempt to detect its subtle notes of the hibiscus.

**You Can Eat Your Beer, Too.** Nothing's better than beer-steamed clams at the beach. Follow this recipe from a guy who should know, Chris Fischer of Beetlebung Farm on Martha's Vineyard.

**Scraping the Bottom of the Barrel Is Delicious.** Searching for the final frontier in flavor, brewers have begun re-purposing old wine barrels to store their suds. Why should you care? That wood adds sweetness and spice to your brew, making it tastier and more complex. Look for the tart and tannic Flora wheat ale from cult Vermont brewery Hill Farmstead and Supplication sour brown ale, from the lovely Russian River Brewing Company ■





## THERE'S A NEW WORLD CAPITAL OF BEER: PORTLANDIA!

► It's not Munich. It's not London. It's Portland, Oregon, our nation's largest market for locally crafted brews and a place where beer has seeped into the civic culture. The staggering number and vast variety of bars, pubs, and breweries may just inspire you to drink away an entire day. Density makes Portland the craft beer capital of the world. Not just that we have more breweries than any other city – about 85 in the metro area, a number that increases Photo by Lisa Morrison monthly. But craft beer is everywhere. The diviest dive bar has a couple of craft taps. Fried-chicken-and-cigarette mini marts are growler fill stations, as are some Safeways – all 49 of them easy to find on the latest growler-fill map. There's a Chinese restaurant that brews its own rice lager. We have taprooms, tasting rooms, bottleshops and brewpubs by the bushel. We have beer tour buses, walking pub tours and pedal lounges powered by enthusiastic beer tourists.

In short, good beer has gone viral: Portland has long had a great pub culture (how else to deal with a gray Portland winter?) and we have a wealth of resources – great water and some of the world's best hops within an hour's drive. Plus, the brewing infrastructure, maltsters, stainless steel fabricators, yeast suppliers, a bottle plant and more, was already in place from the days of Blitz Weinhard and other industrial brewers from that time.

All these things made Portland ripe for revolution, but we beer drinkers can take credit too, because we were willing to try that funny cloudy hefeweizen or those first banana-y Red Hook beers, or BridgePort's shockingly hoppy IPA.

Start outside of town at Timberline Lodge. The mountaintop site where *The Shining* was filmed is also home to the basement Blue Ox Bar. Have a Mt. Hood Multorporter for breakfast. Descend Highway 35 to the charming Columbia Gorge town of Hood River. You're here for a Cascade Pilsner and a bucket of sweet-potato fries at Full Sail Brew Pub. Crawl your way over to the Low Brow Lounge and don't leave until you set the high score at Big Buck Hunter

By the numbers, Portland is consistently ranked top three in breweries per capita and at last count there are roughly 130 breweries and brewpubs in the aforementioned metro area. In the end, Portland provides a nearly identical number of options within an area at least 1,500 square miles smaller. I could go on for days explaining why the Rose City wears the crown in the US, but the real question is, who else on the planet can make such a claim? ■







All In.





ORIGI  
ALS

FIRST WE FEAST!

# DOMU ARIGATO!

BY: LAWRENCE PERRY  
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SHOREFIRE



**Domu, the new ramen restaurant moving into East End Market, is now taking reservations**



**Ramen! Ramen! Everywhere ramen!** (And tacos.) But back to ramen – the city’s love affair with these noodly bowls has only deepened, and a break-up isn’t very likely. In my estimation, the trend hasn’t even peaked, and that’s hardly a surprise. Ramen is cheap, for one thing, and it’s wholly comforting. Plus it elicits a mild snobbery – “ramen connoisseurship,” as Jonathan Gold calls it – particularly among millennials, many of whom gladly queue up for hours for a chance to dribble tonkotsu down their bearded yaps. At Domu, the (sometimes 45-minute) wait is for a tonkotsu simmered for 18 hours, then ladled into a bowl of al dente noodles. It’s called the “Richie Rich” (\$13), and it lives up to its name. Ajitama, the marinated soft-boiled egg with near-runny yolk, and the heady essence of sesame only accentuate this opaque pool of luxuriance.

Slurping it all in this familiar space makes you forget the mighty fine Basque fare that was once served within these very walls. It feels brighter in the main dining room (“I feel like I should be singing show tunes,” said one of my guests) than it does in the proper lounge, which has a proper midcentury aesthetic and where one can get a proper good adult drink.

Signature cocktails are designed by Rene Nguyen (of Herman’s Loan Office and Hanson’s Shoe Repair) and the bar is where many choose to enjoy their meal – so long as it’s not ramen. Seems owner Sean “Sonny” Nguyen doesn’t want ramen served at the bar for some nebulous reason (maybe because slurping is messy? No one I asked really had a clear answer), but everything else goes. So then, barflies: I suggest going to town on crazy-crisp Korean fried chicken (\$8) shellacked in Korean butter sauce; perfectly grilled octopus (\$9) with smashed fingerling potatoes; a plate of bracing Sichuan cucumbers (\$5); or a bowl of oh-so-cheesy corn (\$6) blended with melted mozzarella, Kewpie mayo, scallions and togarashi. Oh so delicious!

You might even get away with an order of brothless uni ramen (\$16), though don’t hold me to the fire if you’re told otherwise. I had hoped for a little more than a measly dollop of “sea foie” atop the heap of noodles, but a nice uni butter sauce helped temper my dismay, and the addition of ikura (roe) and crispy red quinoa were textural strokes of genius. Still, I’d much rather hover over a steamy bowl of duck-fat-infused shoyu broth

(\$13), plucking out fried chicken thighs and kikurage ‘shrooms. On nights when allergies get the better of me, the sneaky heat of the curry ramen (\$13) and its Siamese flavors (infernal Thai hots included) is my soup of choice.

Cooked for more than 18 hours, the Richie Rich ramen (\$13) lived up to its name with a milky, indulgent pork broth. Fall-apart pork belly, a gelatinous soft-boiled egg and mushrooms accompanied the ramen noodles goodness.

#### What I didn’t like

I like my chicken wings crispy, but Domu’s KFC, or Korean Fried Chicken (\$8), took it to an unappetizing level. Tough fried skin with a watery sauce gave way to very little meat in each of the six wings.

#### What I would put on Instagram

Domu’s Tokyo ramen (\$13) has already made it onto my Instagram page (@ladelgado13). The bowl was filled with a steaming, light soy-based broth, chicken thigh, half of a hard-boiled egg, curly noodles, garlic chives and delicious kikurage mushrooms.

#### Other eats at Domu

Every once in a while, a mild, sweet shishito pepper will have an extra kick to it (I read that one in 10 pack a punch). That wasn’t the case for us with Domu’s small plate of these crunchy peppers doused in brown butter, a soy sauce mixture and crisp red quinoa (\$7). They were addicting and left some heat in the back of our throats. The curry ramen (\$13) had the spice depth you expect from this dish, plus some extra heat courtesy of Thai basil and Thai chili. Along with

ramen noodles, the broth contained fried chicken thigh, amazing Japanese beech mushrooms and delicious bamboo shoots.

#### How I was treated

Service couldn’t have been better. Our server was friendly and toed the line between intrusive and conscientious. The meal itself came out at a good pace from the kitchen.

#### My next visit

DOMU prides itself on making all their noodles in house. No dried noodles here. DOMU serves classic Ramen staples like Tonkotsu and Yuzu Chicken as well as their own creations not found anywhere else. I tried the Tokyo Ramen (\$13), one of their in-house creations. It’s a Shoyu chicken broth, with a fried chicken thigh, ajitama brulee, kikurage (wood ear mushroom), seared garlic chives, infused duck fat, and garlic scallion confit. The broth is what makes or breaks a Ramen bowl. The Shoyu chicken broth was absolutely fantastic. The duck fat shimmered beautifully in the broth. The fresh noodles soaked in all the flavor of the broth. As you slurped it up, the taste didn’t end when you swallowed the broth, but lasted until every noodle was finished in the bite. The fried chicken thigh was tender and tasted amazing. The real surprise was the ajitama brulee. Normally in ramen you get an ajitama or a half soft boiled egg. On its own, it’s a very good thing with a slightly soft white and a beautiful custard-yolk mixing with the rest of the ramen. DOMU’s take on the ajitama is topped with a little sugar and bruleed. The result is a kick of sweet in a sea of deep savory-ness and umami. It was genius and made me look down at my bowl hoping the other half of that egg was

in there somewhere. Next time, I’m ordering an extra ajitama brulee with my ramen. After eating everything in the bowl, I turned that thing up and drank the broth straight. I didn’t care who saw me. I’m seriously considering changing the name of this section to “Brunch menu.” After all I mean why not? Great food should always be had no matter the time.

Desserts aren’t offered, though there is a fair bit of candy – eye candy – in the form of a freaky-dreamy Boy Kong mural, potted plants ensconced on walls, and a curious mix of reading materials in the lounge. There are hanging tapestries one of my guests said were reminiscent of the ones in the hotel from *The Shining*. No doubt Sonny Nguyen is conscious of the impact such whimsical design flourishes have on Domu’s target audience – an audience keenly aware that all work and a lot more play

Overall, my visit to the much hyped DOMU was sort of successful. I would probably avoid the Tako. While it was the first time I ordered it, I would be scared to order it again as the smell turned me off of that dish forever. The most important thing is that the Ramen is fantastic. It is absolutely worth a return visit. Small plates are great for those in your party not about the Ramen life with the DOMU wings undoubtedly earning their praise ■



**We’re all quite thankful for East End Market’s new ramen-ya Domu.”**











# One More THING Catchin' Up with

## ANDERSON.PAAK

BY: LAWRENCE PERRY

# A

Anderson .Paak is multitasking. He and his collaborators are spread across several rooms in Hollywood Sound Studio. A drummer and a keyboard player are improvising somewhere, and .Paak is hunting for rolling papers. The bustle inside the studio is not so different from how .Paak's career comes across: bright, busy, varied. In the last 18 months, he has been featured (heavily) on Dr. Dre's *Compton*; released a second album, *Malibu*, under his own name; and put out the first full-length from *NxWorries*, his project with producer Knxwledge.

It was *Compton* that brought the Oxnard, Calif., native into wider public consciousness, but .Paak managed to pull the focus back to his work. *Malibu* was nominated for best urban contemporary album, and .Paak is nominated for best new artist. No overnight success is anything like overnight; .Paak has appeared on recordings under various names since 2009. Since then, he has paid the bills by doing everything from harvesting weed to touring as American Idol contestant from Haley Rhinehart's drummer.

With his own band, The Free Nationals, .Paak takes multitasking to its logical extreme, drumming, rapping, singing and bouncing around the stage. "With the new generation of R&B, the influences are starting to change," says .Paak. "I do soul music, but there are a lot of outside influences -- indie rock, electro, dance." His vision of R&B is less quiet storm, more rainbow tornado. "This generation truly benefits from a talent as diverse as his," says Tip "T.I." Harris, who rapped on .Paak's song "Come Down." "I wish him the best of luck, though I don't think he'll need it much."

A few weeks from turning 30, .Paak can easily present as one of several people. Though he's wiry and boyish, he's a veteran. He and his wife, Hey Oun, have been together for 10 years, six of them married. They have a 6-year-old son named Soul, who is fond of Wiz Khalifa's 2011 hit "Black and Yellow" (and some of his dad's music).

When .Paak returns from his journey around the studio, papers in hand, he exclaims, "Thank you, Lord!" settles into his chair and starts rolling. His manager, Adrian Miller, pops his head in to ask if the drumming is too loud. .Paak smiles and shakes his head. "No, no. It's a good vibe."

### How does it feel to be nominated?

It means a lot to me, especially because *Malibu* didn't blow up on radio or become some huge commercial smash. I'm new to the Grammys in a few ways. I didn't know until a couple of years ago who was doing the voting — other artists and producers and people making their duty to vote, that's when things go haywire. We need to make sure the right people are being nominated. But whether they got it wrong or right, I'm just happy to be in the building. It's not going to be the end of the world if I don't win.

### What is next for you?

We're touring now with Bruno Mars. He's one of the last entertainers; he's got the whole nine. And Q-Tip is one of my favorites. I'm about to take a red-eye tonight just to work with him.

### What else are you excited about or what do you get excited by?

I really f—ed with Solange's album. And the thing about Adele and Beyoncé that I like is that they are two women making music that isn't demeaning to them: "We do what we do, and we're not here selling some bullshit." That makes me excited about the industry, still. Major props to Adele. There's no flutes or whistles on [25]. It's her voice and a f—ing piano ■

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**BRUNO MARS...  
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